

Westfield Schools Open With New Staff, Courses, Roofs

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — When Westfield public schools opened on Tuesday, students were greeted by 53 new teachers, an interim assistant principal at Westfield High School (WHS), the return of a school resource officer at the high school and a new supervisor of language arts.

As part of construction work this summer, roofs have been replaced at Westfield High School, Roosevelt Intermediate School and Washington Elementary School. The work is part of a \$13.6-million bond referendum approved by voters last December.

Next summer roofs are scheduled to

be replaced at Franklin, Jefferson, McKinley, Tamaques, Wilson, Lincoln (Early Childhood Development Center) and Edison Intermediate (EIS) schools, and at the Elm Street administrative offices.

The board of education voted Tuesday night to approve a question to be placed on the Tuesday, November 5 General Election ballot asking voters to re-approve the school bond with additional information allowing the district to accept \$2.7 million in state funding as part of a new state grant. State funding would account for 40 percent of the roofing replacement costs, according to school officials.

In addition to the roofs, more than 25

classrooms in Westfield schools have been painted. Work at EIS included replacement of sidewalks, bleachers and boilers. Summer maintenance projects have taken place throughout the district, including updating heating valves, removing and installing new flooring, replacing sidewalks and installing new lockers, countertops, drop ceilings and ceiling lights.

During an interview August 23 in her office with *The Westfield Leader*, Superintendent Margaret Dolan said the district is in negotiations with several of its employee collective bargaining groups, including the Westfield Education Association (WEA), which represents teachers, whose contract expired in June.

"We've been working on it over the summer so I'm confident we will have a contract in the near future," Ms. Dolan said.

The Westfield Board of Education held a special meeting Tuesday night to ratify the contract (see story this page).

Other groups in negotiations are the custodians, secretaries and paraprofessionals.

In terms of administrative staff changes, Pamela Ackerman-Garcia has been hired as the district's new K-12 language arts supervisor. She previously had been curriculum supervisor with the Monroe Township Schools. She replaced Tim Harrison, who left for a job closer to his home in Monmouth County.

"We are very pleased with Mrs. Garcia. She has experience as a supervisor in other districts and teaches also at the College of New Jersey," Ms. Dolan said, noting that Mrs. Garcia started her new position on August 1 and has been involved in training of teachers.

Longtime WHS teacher Margaret McFadden is serving as interim assistant principal at the high school, replacing Derrick Nelson, who is on military leave in Kuwait.

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New Root Building to Be Home to Art Gallery

By SARA MAGNOLA-TANER
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — Over a year-and-a-half after being destroyed in a six-alarm fire, the reconstructed building on the corner of South Avenue West and Westfield Avenue is almost complete and will soon be inhabited by a new tenant.

Westfield resident and long-time property owner William Root told *The Westfield Leader* last week that he has leased the entire 10,000-square-foot space to a single tenant, Gallery U Boutique of Universal Institute, at the beginning of July for a five-year term. The newly constructed, two-story building houses retail space on the lower level and five apartments upstairs.

"The whole building is rented to the boutique and art gallery," Mr. Root said. "The people in rehab will be working the store to get back on their feet, while living in the five apartments upstairs."

Prior to the fire in January 2012, the then one-story, 60-year old structure and the neighboring building were home to several businesses including Clyné & Murphy caterers, the Sound Station, Figaro's Hair Styling, Rocky the Taylor, Cobblers Bench Shoe Repair and Unmasked.

"I miss the old place – it will differ, that's for sure," Mr. Root said.

According to a press release issued by Robert Langdon, gallery manager of Gallery U Boutique, "Gallery U Boutique is an extension of Universal Institute, a rehabilitation facility that services adults with traumatic brain injuries (TBI). The venue serves as a vocational training program whose goal is to introduce people with TBI back into the workforce and community. Clients at Universal Institute take part in all aspects of running Gallery U



GOODBYE, SUMMER...Summer comes to a close as carnival rides and the ferris wheel light the sky at the annual St. Bartholomew/UNICO Italian Festival held Labor Day weekend in Scotch Plains. Cassandra Segulin for The Westfield Leader

Westfield BOE Ratifies WEA Contract; Staff to Get 2 Percent Hike

By DELL SIMEONE
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — The board of education, on Tuesday evening, held a special meeting to ratify a new one-year contract with the Westfield Education Association (WEA) effective retroactive from July 1, 2013 to July 1, 2014. Under terms of the agreement, the teachers will receive a 2-percent raise.

Board member Ginny Leiz, who was part of the school board's negotiating team, read a prepared statement which said, "The average settlement rate for teachers' contracts in the state this year is 2.5 percent. Westfield teachers will be required to contribute to their health care benefits. They can continue to

waive district coverage if they have other sources of insurance, according to Business Administrator Dana Sullivan. The waiver will yield approximately \$760,000 in savings in the current year."

In a prepared statement distributed at the meeting, WEA President Kim Schumacher said, "Although negotiations are never easy, the WEA is pleased

to announce that we have reached an agreement with the board on a successor contract. We look forward to doing what we do best...educating the students of Westfield." Calls to her home by *The Westfield Leader* were not returned.

The larger contribution to the health care benefits this year will be 1.5 percent.

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Mountainside Council Set to Issue Gas Upgrade Permits

By DOMINIC A. LAGANO
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

MOUNTAINSIDE — During its regular work session Tuesday night, the Mountainside Borough Council held a lengthy discussion regarding permit applications submitted by Elizabethtown Gas in order to upgrade its gas line infrastructure in the borough.

As previously covered in a recent edition of *The Westfield Leader*, the Mountainside Renewal Project entails replacing existing pipelines in the borough, either by sealing off sections of gas lines and building new ones in a new location or by removing and replacing existing gas lines in the same location.

The plan involves digging up sections and, in some cases, entire streets, to accomplish the task.

A committee from the borough, comprised of Borough Administrator James Debbie and council members Deanna Andre, William Lane and Glenn Mortimer, has been conducting negotiations with Elizabethtown Gas over the past several weeks to determine what percentage of the cost to repave affected roads will be paid by the borough and what percentage will be paid for by Elizabethtown Gas.

The committee also is determining whether an entire street will require repaving or just a portion of it, potentially increasing the cost to the borough.

Assisting the committee is Borough Engineer Michael Disko, Jr., who provided a report on the condition of the affected roads and the progress of the negotiations thus far. "They

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I HAVE A DREAM...Mayor Andrew Skibitsky, Pastor Wendell Lancaster of St. Luke's AME Church and members of the Martin Luther King, Jr. (MLK) event committee gather at the "I Have a Dream" speech event at the Martin Luther King Memorial in Westfield on August 28. See www.goleader.com/photos. Paul Lachenaier for The Westfield Leader

Garwood Planning Bd. OKs Second Floor on Willow Ave.

By MEGAN K. SCOTT
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

GARWOOD — Borough Planning Board members have unanimously approved a variance permitting a homeowner to build a second-floor addition closer to the front edge of his property than ordinances allow.

Ivan Pacella, of 324 Willow Avenue, is building a suite for his widowed mother-in-law over the left side of his single-family home, which includes the garage. The house is 17.7 feet from the property line instead of the required 25 feet.

"The variance is necessary because part of the existing first floor is closer than 25 feet from the front property line," Mr. Pacella's attorney, Gary Maher, explained at the August 28 planning board meeting. "The applicants want to build straight up above that existing first floor."

After board member Bill Nierstedt expressed concern about "front-yard creep," among other things, Mr. Pacella agreed to three caveats. He must sign a deed restriction that will prohibit him or any future property owner from turning the home into a two-family dwell-

ing; he must reconfigure his two-car driveway into a one-car space, and there will be no further front-yard encroachment.

Mr. Pacella and his wife, Philomena, purchased the more than century-old home six years ago. His father-in-law recently died, and his mother-in-law moved in.

"Basically what we want to do is give her her own little space that if she wants, she can be with us, or if she needs that one day on her own, she can just go and she's got her own bedroom, her own living and her own bathroom," Mr. Pacella said.

The addition also includes creating another bedroom so all of his children can have their own rooms, he added.

Mr. Pacella said if he had to follow the 25-foot setback for the second floor, he would lose eight feet of the bedroom for his mother-in-law and would not be able to have a separate bedroom for his son. He said the house also would look "ridiculous, with a flat roof in the front and going straight up."

Mr. Nierstedt told Mr. Maher that the property could conform to the require-

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CELEBRITY BAKER...Buddy Valastro, from the popular reality television show "Cake Boss," cuts crumb cake for the crowd at the grand opening of Carlo's Bakery. Christie Storms for The Westfield Leader



CAKE BOSS...Westfield Mayor Andy Skibitsky and celebrity baker, Buddy Valastro, from the popular reality television show "Cake Boss," gather with Mr. Valastro's family and curious onlookers at the grand opening of Carlo's Bakery on East Broad Street. See story page 18 and www.goleader.com/photos. Christie Storms for The Westfield Leader

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